

Impossible Allies? How Aggressive U.S. Policy Empowers Iranian Hardliners

JAKE KHAWAJA, *Rutgers University*

Abstract

This paper examines the legacy of US policy towards Iran, and the implication those policies have had on domestic politics of the country. The paper focuses on the continuation and intensification of aggression toward Iran through policy under the Trump Administration. The historical context will be reviewed to offer context for this dynamic, and Putnam's two-level game theory will be a theoretical framework through which the relationship between foreign and domestic politics will be examined. It is argued that harsher U.S. policies toward Iran are responsible for recent hardline election victories in the recent Iranian parliamentary and presidential elections.

keywords: Iran; United States; domestic politics; foreign policy; Trump; Obama

In the aftermath of the 2021 Iranian presidential election, history appears to have repeated itself. The Trump Administration has pursued an especially intransigent policy of aggression toward Iran by imposing a campaign of economic warfare and transparent attempts at military escalation. This posture has substantially diminished the popularity of Iranian reformists, the ramification of which have played out in the recent elections that saw Iranian hardliners recapture all major levers of Iranian government. Regrettably, however, this story is not new. Based on the historical record of U.S.-Iran relations, as well as a range of expert opinions, the dynamic in which U.S. escalation inadvertently promotes the most extreme voices in Iran, is a perennial one. From the earliest days of the Islamic Republic, the United States has played the role of an external threat enabling the rhetoric of the Islamic Revolution as espoused by its most extreme proponents.

This paper reviews pertinent aspects of the historical record in the context of this broader theme, and subsequently argues that we can understand the policies of Obama and Trump toward Iran as constituting very different iterations of what Putnam (1988) calls “two-level game theory.” According to Putnam, “at the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favorable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments.”¹ The crucial idea behind two-level game theory is that international negotiations cannot be considered independently of the interests expressed by a country’s domestic constituencies. In large part, it has been precisely this dynamic at

work when the United States pursues aggressive policies towards Iran. Such policies have discouraged the domestic Iranian populace to elect leaders who will pursue cooperation with the U.S. and the international community more broadly and thereby provide Iran’s political leaders with a strong incentive to maintain a hardline position toward the United States. The theoretical framework of two-level game theory, therefore, allows for an effective contrasting of the impact of Obama’s limited-engagement approach to Iran with that of Trump’s maximum pressure strategy.²

Background: The Islamic Revolution

In the early days of the Islamic Revolution, the United States was a foil for Khomeinist ideology, and the imagery of the “Great Satan” helped to unify the cause of the revolution behind Khomeini’s line. More generally, anti-United States rhetoric was employed against competing liberal democratic visions for the future of the Islamic Revolution, such as that advocated by then Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan.

Since the United States’ role in overthrowing the government of Mohammad Mosaddegh in 1953, the U.S. has been viewed in Iran as a source of external “contamination” of Iranian society. This sentiment was especially pronounced during the reforms of the White Revolution from 1963 to 1979, which were largely viewed as part of what Jalal al-e Ahmad called “Westoxification,” wherein Western cultural standards were rapidly imposed on the deeply religious Iranian society.³ In addition, the economic reforms of the White Revolution exacerbated inequality in Iran and undermined the traditional economic hierarchy in its rigid class-based society. Because of its role in establishing the Shah’s

regime, the U.S. was viewed as responsible for what many viewed as the economic detriment brought about by the White Revolution. The imagery of the “Great Satan” appeals to a centuries-old theme in Shia mythology, namely, the struggle between a person’s morally “pure” internal core and the material temptations of the external world.⁴ The United States, evidently, occupied the latter role.

It was against this backdrop that the 1979 Islamic Revolution occurred. It was evident that whoever could convincingly establish themselves as the antithesis of the pervasive force of American influence would enjoy a favorable public standing and, thus, strategic political advantages. In the early days of the Islamic Revolution, there was a power struggle, albeit an unbalanced one, between Khomeini’s vision for an Islamic Republic and Bazargan’s vision for a *Democratic* Islamic Republic. Bazargan wanted to include this latter, democratic option in Iran’s constitutional referendum, which Khomeini rejected.⁵

Within the context of this power struggle, a critical turning point in Iran’s transformation occurred: the Iranian hostage crisis. When the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam’s Line captured and detained 52 hostages at the American embassy in Tehran, Khomeini saw a political opportunity to purge his government of those who were disloyal to his hardline vision of the Islamic Revolution. He quickly endorsed the demonstrators’ actions, which was nearly immediately followed by the resignation of Bazargan and his cabinet on November 6th.⁶

The Muslim Students’ suspicion that the United States was attempting to undermine the Islamic regime, which inspired the hostage crisis, was largely unfounded. In reality, the U.S. was primarily attempting to gather intelligence on as many opposition forces within Iran as

possible.⁷ These primarily included the quietist members of the Shia ulama who opposed clerical involvement in political activities, ethnic rebellions - particularly Arab and Kurdish - within Iran, and opposition to the Iranian government from exiled Iranians. It was only the first of these in which U.S. officials had any interest, and they retained frequent contact with the most prominent clerical opponent of the Islamic regime, Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari.⁸ The ethnic separatist movements clearly had a destabilizing potential, but the United States opposed them because they had a strong preference for a stable and territorially sovereign Iran under U.S. influence, particularly one that would serve as a buffer against the putative threat of Soviet expansionism. Moreover, there was widespread fear among U.S. officials that a successful Kurdish rebellion within Iran could empower Kurdish separatists in Turkey, an ever-important U.S. ally. Finally, U.S. intelligence recognized that exiled opposition (the goal of which was the restoration of the Pahlavi monarchy), while well-funded, had essentially no popular support in Iran and it was therefore futile to seriously engage it.⁹ However, the scars of 26 years of U.S. interference in Iran’s domestic affairs remained, and the paranoia regarding American interests embedded in Iranian political consciousness had been ossified. Anti-American sentiment thereafter served inexorably as a source of ideological unification for the hardline view of political Islam espoused by Khomeinists.

The Iran-Iraq War

The Iraqi invasion of Iran, supported, in its later days, by the U.S. intelligence apparatus, was another ideologically unifying force for Iran’s hardliners. The United States’ partiality in the brutal conflict between Iraq and Iran became in

evident in 1982. Two years after Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran, but directly after Iran launched a counter-invasion subsequent to halting the progression of Iraqi forces into Iranian territory, the Reagan Administration called for a ceasefire.¹⁰ Immediately after the initial invasion, however, neither the United Nations Security Council as a body nor the United States called for an end to Baghdad's aggression. This became fodder for another legitimate Iranian grievance against U.S. policy. The United States was always aware (at least since 1983) that Iraq was using chemical weapons.¹¹ However, they did not provide direct support to the attacks until 1987, when it was revealed that Iran was on the verge of launching an offensive to capture the city of Basrah, and that if such an offensive was successful, Iran would likely emerge victorious in the conflict. The U.S., fearing an Iranian victory, provided Iraq with key intelligence on the location of Iranian military facilities, thus enabling more targeted Iraqi chemical attacks. Subsequently, Iraq gassed the Kurdish village of Halabja in Northern Iraq, made possible by U.S. intelligence.¹²

The U.S. backing of Iraqi aggression toward Iran provided multiple opportunities for exploitation by hardline voices in Iran. The policy opened the door for the globalization of the Islamic Revolution. In 1982, Iran had an opportunity to launch a counter-invasion of Iraq, which became a launching pad for a campaign of revolutionary export with international ambitions.¹³ Second, with the Iranian people united against an external enemy, the leaders of the Islamic Republic used the war to their domestic advantage to "sequentially decimate a diverse milieu of political opponents."¹⁴ The mullahs in Iran saw an opportunity to consolidate their power due to a surge of nationalistic support that emerged during the beginning of war. Third, the refusal of the international community to

take decisive action on Iraqi human rights violations has also encouraged a view in Iran that, as articulated by Rafsanjani, international law is utterly impotent in counteracting atrocities that are committed in the interests of powerful nations (see Pear 1989).¹⁵ Consequently, Iranian disillusionment with international bodies and regulations has justified the violations of international conventions, as exemplified by its pursuit of defensive weaponry, including chemical weapons and nuclear deterrence (in violation of their obligations under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons). This, moreover, encouraged an aggressive regional policy against Israel and Saudi Arabia, largely viewed in Iran to be defensive in nature. But perhaps the most significant consequence of the "imposed war," as it is referenced in Iran, is its social legacy. Even today, Iranian officials insistently reference the war with Iraq to maintain a culture of national unity and martyrdom, especially as a growing younger generation in Iran is less and less compelled by historical sources of deep revolutionary fervor. A population that might have otherwise been more inclined to turn a critical eye to the domestic repressions of their own regime and push for further democratization and liberalization has been, in some regard, hindered by the unifying cultural force of the Iraqi invasion. Encompassed within this retelling of the war's legacy is the remembrance of United States' support for Saddam Hussein, and the deafening silence of the international community in the face of horrific humanitarian violations on the part of the Iraqi military. This was a generous gift to hardline voices in Iran. Iranian Domestic Reform U.S. policy has also played a notable role in undermining sincere attempts at reform Iran, particularly during the Khatami years. During the reform movement, President Khatami had to tread softly in order to promote his so-called "dialogue among civilizations"

without provoking hardliners in Iran. He achieved serious success in engaging Europe on bilateral trade negotiations. Even more difficult, he initially managed to improve relations with the United States (given the anti-American fervor in Iran), as was evidenced by Iranian cooperation with the United States' military campaign in Afghanistan.¹⁶ After Iran had failed to expand its influence into Africa via Sudan with General Bashir in 1989, who ultimately dismantled Al-Qaeda terror infrastructure under U.S. pressure, Iranian officials – particularly reformists – presumably came to understand that their previous cooperation with Sunni terrorists only damaged Iran's international standing.¹⁷ Yet, after this promising cooperation, Bush decided to lump Iran into the so-called “axis of evil” in his State of the Union address and subsequently renewed trade sanctions on Iran, as part of the broader context for his administration's War on Terror. Many hardliners, such as conservative politician Hamidreza Taraqqi, argued that this was indicative of the irreconcilable differences in ideological and political interests exhibited by the U.S. and Iran, and that this failure was a testament to the futility of conciliatory reformist policies.¹⁸

In 2004, the hardline principlist coalition achieved supermajority-level victories in the Iranian legislative election. And in 2005, Ahmadienjad was elected to replace Khatami. The hardline victory was largely a consequence of the renewed threatening posture that the United States had adopted towards Iran. This posture included persistent warnings and criticism from the Bush Administration about Iran's nuclear program, which turned the younger generation in Iran – previously more open to an externally-supported transition to a liberalized society - against the United States.¹⁹ These developments offer insight

into the contemporary obstacles facing normalization between Iran and the US, as well the unlikelihood of a youth-led movement to liberal democracy.

Obama and Iran

Obama's approach to Iran was premised on the notion of containment. It is important to note that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action was not a plan to fully normalize relations with Iran. It represented a possibility that the agreement would contribute to a lasting improvement in relations between the two countries, thus acting as a catalyst to future easing of tensions and progress towards normalization. However, within the particular framework of the JCPOA, normalization was not, and could not have been, achieved. This is primarily because the broader sanctions against Iran remained intact. Iran was subject to a comprehensive set of obligations and a rigorous IAEA inspection in return for an easing of secondary sanctions, including sanctions targeted at non-US entities doing business inside Iran and mainly designed to penalize allies who engage Iran economically. The strategy, then, was to contain Iran's regional influence and prevent it from gaining a nuclear deterrence capacity it did not already have, rather than to either embrace Iran as a member of the international community or to engage in wholesale confrontation targeted at explicitly reducing Iran's established military, economic, and diplomatic power.²⁰

Trump and Iran

While many characterize the Trump administration's foreign policy as extremist, US policy on Iran during his tenure was not an extreme departure from decades of policy

precedent before Obama, merely an escalation. Perennial hostility toward Iran culminated in Trump's "maximum pressure" strategy following his administration's exit of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal. It is worth outlining the steps that led away from the relatively diplomatic approach of the Obama administration to the relations with Iran that the Biden administration is grappling with in its first year.

Trump began his term with a much more confrontational approach, following a campaign that had only acknowledged Iran as a threat as well as consistent disparagement of the JCPOA.²¹ Though Trump's personal involvement in, and knowledge of, U.S.-Iran relations may have been minimal, the general complaints his administration espoused were commonplace in the neoconservative backlash to the deal. Among them were concerns that the deal empowered the continuation of Iranian regional intervention, which neglects the possibility that a lack of a coherent non-proliferation strategy would not also empower Iran's regional intervention by leaving open the pathway to a nuclear deterrent. Another concern raised by Trump and conservatives was the restricted timeline of JCPOA limitations on the Iranian nuclear program. Trump's strategy to end U.S. involvement in the deal was delegating to Congress to remedy some of the supposed shortcomings in the agreement. This culminated in the Corker-Cotton proposal, which would impose new sanctions triggers in the event of Iran getting closer to nuclear weapons capabilities and removed the controversial "sunset" provisions, which experts agree do not provide a pathway to a bomb.²² Shifting the onus to Congress, while knowing that the proposal in Congress would likely fail, Trump created more justification for his decision to withdraw

from the JCPOA. Furthermore, Trump's imposition of unrealistic demands as a framework for future negotiations also undermined the argument from JCPOA-advocates that enough progress had been made to warrant continued membership in or compliance with the agreement as well as future engagement with Iran on security matters.

Maximum Pressure Strategy

Following the withdrawal from the JCPOA, the Trump Administration began to pursue their maximum pressure strategy. This strategy was a transparent attempt to undermine the Iranian economy and the standard of living in Iran, in hopes that the Iranian population would mistake their own regime for the source of increased material suffering, rather than correctly recognizing that an aggressive campaign of economic warfare by the United States. This was, in effect, a blatant attempt at regime change through the policy of economic terrorism. The impact was so severe that Iran took the United States to the International Court of Justice on grounds that the policy stood in violation of the 1955 Treaty of Amity. The ICJ ruled against U.S. sanctions on humanitarian supplies, such as medicine, and the ruling was perceived to be predominantly in Iran's favor.²³ The United States subsequently withdrew from the Treaty of Amity, but this does not negate a ruling that was premised on the legal framework that existed at the time of the dispute. Iran's response to this policy has been continued engagement with the European Union in order to evade the harsh U.S. sanctions to keep their economy afloat. Washington's initial strategy was to enact a complete global oil embargo on Iran. This ultimately failed because, in the face of declining oil prices, OPEC countries agreed to decrease oil production. The reduction made it vastly more difficult to rely on the

Gulf states to compensate for the 4% reduction in oil supply that would inexorably result from an embargo on Iran.²⁴ Washington also faced problems putting this policy into effect in that many countries, such as Iraq, relied on trade with Iran in order to maintain stable economies. Consequently, the U.S. had to issue sanctions waivers for certain countries with economic interdependence with Iran.²⁵

This policy has been yet another incredible opportunity for Iranian hardliners. The consequences of Trump's exit of the JCPOA included Khamenei's reprimand against Rouhani and the JCPOA as well as the assumption of power by hardliners into leadership positions where they express no interest in a new nuclear deal. The withdrawal left the Trump administration with only three options: a military response, a cyberattack, or additional sanctions. The first option had the potential to turn into an escalatory spiral and lead to full-blown war. The second could lead to Iranian retaliation on America's cybersecurity infrastructure. And additional sanctions would be largely ineffectual, despite leading to some further economic consequences for the domestic population.²⁶ Of course, relatively ineffectual sanctions would encourage the hardliners insofar as it demonstrates that the United States is not prepared for direct confrontation, which encouraged an increase in Iranian regional interventions. In its final hours, the Trump Administration opted for a continuation of the third of these options, including deliberately hindering the Iranian response to COVID-19 by blocking a \$5 billion IMF loan to Iran.²⁷ While the U.S. avoided direct confrontation, the threat of future war looms today as hardline voices find themselves back in control, in large part due to Trump's aggressive and short-sighted foreign policy.

Upon Trump's withdrawal from the JCPOA, Rouhani was also reprimanded by

Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, who heads both the Guardian Council and the Assembly of Experts. Trump's empowering of hardliners risks not only boosting hard-liners' electability, which recent election results have shown, but also risks provoking IRGC military escalation in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, or other potential loci of U.S. strategic interests, or those of allies.²⁸

Domestic Response

The most recent parliamentary elections saw a dismal turnout rate of only 42.5%, while the recent presidential election saw only 48.48% turnout, reflecting a sense of despondency among the Iranian public. Increasingly, opposition to hardliners is now expressed through outright political dissent, reflective of an increasing gap between the Iranian youth and the centers of institutional power. Seeing no viable political outlet in moderate politicians - who ultimately failed to achieve lasting, constructive dialogue with the United States even though this was due almost entirely to U.S. obstinacy under Trump - Iranian youth increasingly take their frustrations to the streets. Hardliners, empowered by the notion that the results of the recent election lend their outlook further legitimacy, will likely continue to crush these expressions of political dissent with an iron fist.²⁹

Hardline election victories make salvaging what remains of the nuclear deal a much more difficult task. The only reason negotiations aren't entirely doomed to failure is that they may now be more a function of strategic foreign policy calculus than domestic power plays since the Iranian state structure has become consolidated under hard-liner control and there still exists an Iranian power structure pragmatically committed to its own survival. The end of the Trump administration brings with it glimmers of hope that constructive relations

can be salvaged. It is likely that relations will remain at a stand-still in the short-term because the window of opportunity to engage Iran may already have substantially diminished. It is likely that with hardliners in firm control of the Iranian parliament, presidency and, of course, the central expeditionary force in Iran's military (IRGC), Iran will engage in further acts of regional intervention, which will weaken their international standing.³⁰

Of course, the hardline victories in the recent parliamentary and presidential elections were not only due to the Iranian public turning its back on moderate figures like Rouhani and diplomatic engagement with the United States. As mentioned above, general despondency and low participation contributed. The lack of political participation was also exacerbated by higher-than-usual interference in the election by the Guardian Council, the degree of which has not been seen since the 2004 parliamentary elections prior to the end of Khatami's second term as well.³¹ However, these results give us some reason to be pessimistic about the short-term future of U.S.-Iran relations, and unwise U.S. policy seems the most likely culprit.

The transition into the Biden administration comes with an attempt to re-engage Iran where the full consequences of the Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign couldn't be clearer. Trump's aggression toward Iran has substantially lowered the former's incentive for compromise with the Biden administration. Maximum pressure has yielded severe economic desperation and a distribution of wealth that has further favored hardliners. One especially notable impact concerns the fact that Rouhani failed in fulfilling his promise of a more equitable distribution of wealth following foreign engagement to all sectors of Iranian society – many of the most economically desperate

Iranians saw their lives remain more or less the same after the nuclear deal. But after the instigation of Trump's maximum pressure campaign, they saw their lives substantially worsen. The new expectation among many Iranians, then, is that re-engaging the United States is unlikely to improve their lives and may end up worsening it. The story here is familiar: both from the perspective of domestic politics and from the perspective of strategic foreign affairs, Iran's leaders may see little incentive to re-engage with the West.³²

Trump, Obama, and Two-Level Game Theory

The remainder of this paper will contrast the policies of Obama and Trump toward Iran through the lens of Putnam's two-level game theory. Putnam's analysis centers around three aspects of the relationship between domestic and international affairs. Firstly, it concerns the social aspect of international relations; in particular, we want to think about the public attitudes towards the foreign interlocutors and the degree to which the foreign policy issue is domestically politicized. Secondly, it concerns the institutional aspect of international relations; here, we are looking at the degree to which institutional structures are conducive to the formation of bilateral or multilateral agreements and the pursuit of international dialogue. Thirdly, it concerns the interests and incentives of the central negotiators: what do actors stand to benefit from engaging in international agreements and how will such agreements impact their political power?

Regarding the first aspect, the Obama Administration (and the other P5+1 countries that were party to the JCPOA) made great strides in improving the openness of the Iranian public to diplomatic engagement with the United States. This is

most clearly reflected in the enormous electoral gains made by reformists following the signing of the JCPOA. First, 2016 saw the reformist List of Hope coalition take control of the Iranian parliament, previously led by the United Front of Principlists.³³ Subsequently, Rouhani was re-elected in 2017, expanding his vote share relative to his initial election in 2013.³⁴ This is notable, because his initial election was run on the premise that Iran's economic isolation was the main source of its economic problems. In 2007, then-Senator Obama argued in favor of engagement with Iran absent preconditions. Having a sufficiently cooperative administration in the United States endowed Rouhani's 2013 message with more salience. While it is true, as noted above, that Rouhani failed to fulfill his promise of equalizing distribution of the economic benefits of the JCPOA to all sectors of Iranian society, it is evident that, in 2016 and 2017, the Iranian public let it be known that initial engagement with the United States translated into a heightened sense that such engagement would continue to produce desirable economic outcomes.

On the contrary, the Trump Administration produced exactly the opposite public attitude toward engagement with the West in Iran. As discussed in the previous section, the recent parliamentary and presidential election results were dismal for reformists. Moreover, a public opinion study by Gallagher, Mohseni, and Ramsay found that Trump's maximum pressure campaign had produced increased anti-American sentiment and opposition to diplomatic engagement.³⁵ For the first time ever, a majority of Iranians supported withdrawal from the JCPOA and a supermajority supported gradually at least exceeding JCPOA limits. Opposition to re-negotiating the JCPOA increased with the Trump Administration's withdrawal and

reinstatement of sanctions. The survey also found the highest proportion of Iranians with negative attitudes toward the United States in 13 years. When it comes to the first aspect of Putnam's two-level game theoretic approach to international relations, it is clear that Trump's policies broke from Obama's in encouraging, within Iran, widespread public backlash against diplomatic engagement with the United States.

Regarding Putnam's "institutional" aspect, perhaps the most interesting difference between Obama and Trump is the way in which the economic fallout of the maximum pressure campaign strengthened economic institutions that were aligned with hardliners and weakened the basis of financial support for reformists. Under Obama, the JCPOA brought Iran economic growth and therefore financial stability. But, as Kahalzadeh (2021) has pointed out, the economic decline that resulted from the reinstatement of secondary sanctions under Trump led to a situation in which the Iranian state was virtually forced to deficit-spend, incurring themselves to private contractors, and bankrupting those contractors in so doing.³⁶ Especially important to note is that these private contractors were a central locus of financial support for reformist politicians, and because they went bankrupt, an economic void was left and ultimately filled in large part by IRGC-aligned entities. This, too, has handed hardliners a substantial institutional advantage which renders future engagement less likely.

The impact of Trump's policies regarding Putnam's third aspect is twofold. Firstly, by increasing the salience of hardline messaging in Iran, the grip that hardliners have on Iran's government has increased. Hardliners, of course, answer to a different constituency than reformists do as their voters hold greater anti-American sentiment, as do their colleagues and sources of institutional support. As a result, the Biden

Administration will be forced to negotiate with people who generally have less of an incentive or individual desire to work with the United States than those the Obama administration engaged with. Secondly, it is likely that even reformists will be responsive to shifts in public opinion indicating that their political success depends on a more hardline stance against the United States.

Conclusion

Trump's policy toward Iran simultaneously constitutes an especially extreme continuation of a broader historical theme *and* a break from the opportunities for normalization created by the preceding administration. There is little room for doubt about what its consequences will be, and that these consequences will be disastrous for the region. The next step toward making amends with Iran is to pressure Biden and future administrations to show restraint and diplomacy in dealing with a country that the U.S. has spent over half a century provoking and terrorizing. In

particular, it is absolutely imperative that the new administration show a willingness to ease economic sanctions in exchange for Iranian compliance in the original nuclear deal. If any additional demands are to be made – for example, the curbing of Iranian regional involvement, missile testing, and so forth – they must follow good-faith efforts to restore Iranian compliance in the original nuclear deal and must be met with offers to further ease the pressure of economic sanctions on Iran, such as by reversing primary sanctions.

A broader lesson, though, is that U.S. policymakers should be more mindful of how their policies impact popular opinion in Iran, and how that in turn alters the incentive structure of Iranian leaders vis-à-vis the United States. This game of reciprocal escalation within the domestic politics of each country – wherein hardline, neoconservative voices persistently promote the political success of their equally hawkish counterparts – has sent us into a vicious cycle. To paraphrase a particularly wise fictional computer, the only winning move is to stop playing.

¹ Robert Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42(3), (1988): 434.

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³ William Beeman, *The Great Satan vs. the Mad Mullahs: How the United States and Iran Demonize Each Other* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Nicholas Cumming-Bruce, "Bazargan Government Resigns in Iran," *Washington Post*, November 7th, 1979.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Mark Gasiorowski, "US Covert Operations toward Iran, February–November 1979: Was the CIA Trying to Overthrow the Islamic Regime?" *Middle Eastern Studies* 51 (1), (2015): 115-135.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bruce Riedel, "How the Iran-Iraq war shaped the trajectories of figures like Qassem Soleimani," *Brookings*, January 9th, 2020.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Farhad Rezaei and Ofira Seliktar, *Iran, Revolution, and Proxy Wars*, (Cham: Palgrave, 2019).

¹⁴ Behnam Taleblu, (2014, October 23). "The Long Shadow of the Iran-Iraq War" *National Interest*, October 23rd, 2014.

¹⁵ Robert Pear "U.S. WILL PROPOSE WIDE U.N. POWERS ON CHEMICAL ARMS," *New York Times*, January 3rd, 1989.

¹⁶ *Stuck in the Axis of Evil?*, *The Economist*, January 18th, 2003.

¹⁷ Rezaei Seliktar, *Iran, Revolution, and Proxy Wars*.

¹⁸ *Economist, Stuck in the Axis of Evil?*

¹⁹ See Navai 2005.

²⁰ Nader Entessar and Kaveh Afrasiabi, *Trump and Iran: From Containment to Confrontation*, (London: Lexington, 2020).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ali Vaez, "The Iranian Nuclear Deal's Sunset Clauses," *Foreign Affairs*, October 3rd, 2017.

²³ Entessar and Afrasiabi, *Trump and Iran*.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ For much more on the maximum pressure campaign, Trump's opposition to the JCPOA, and attempts by the Trump administration to galvanize the world against the Iranian regime, see Entessar and Afrasiabi 2020.

²⁶ See Pollack 2019 for a discussion of these three alternative courses of action.

²⁷ Ian Talley, "U.S. to Block Iran's Request to IMF for \$5 Billion Loan to Fight Coronavirus," *Wall Street Journal*, April 7th, 2020.

²⁸ See Torfeh 2018.

²⁹ See Mohammadi 2020.

³⁰ See Motevalli 2020.

³¹ See Ansari 2007.

³² Kahalzadeh (2021) gives a thorough *ex post* accounting of how maximum pressure strengthened the position of those in Iran who oppose compromise with the United States.

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³⁴ Thomas Erdbrink, "Rouhani Wins Re-election in Iran by a Wide Margin," *New York Times*, May 20th, 2017.

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